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RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 2367
RUEHMT/AMCONSUL MONTREAL 0266
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 000377

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/07/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [HA](#)

SUBJECT: NEW DIRECTOR GENERAL OF PROVISIONAL ELECTORAL
COUNCIL

REF: PORT AU PRINCE 00134

Classified By: Ambassador Janet Sanderson. Reason: E.O. 12958 1.4 (b)
, (d)

Summary

¶1. (SBU) Pierre-Louis Opont was installed as new Director General of the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) March 6. He appears closer to President Preval than his predecessor. He has no experience managing elections, but has a better relationship with the CEP councilors, which may help produce more effective election management. The draft electoral law remains under consideration by the legislature, and will take several weeks or longer to pass. Senate elections before July are not likely. End summary.

Preval's Personal Choice

¶2. (C) According to Presidential economic adviser Gabriel Verret, Pierre-Louis Opont was President Preval's personal choice for the position, after the CEP demurred at the President's request to submit a list of candidates to succeed Jacques Bernard, who resigned January 23 (reftel). Per Verret, the President chose Opont for his management experience. His most recent position was Director of Operations at the Anti-Corruption Unit (ULCC). Before that, he worked in the private sector as Finance Director for the Centers for Health Development (a private network of health clinics run by the Boulos family), and was Finance and Administrative Director for the Canape Vert Hospital, also in the private sector.

Frank Assessment of Challenges Before CEP

¶3. (SBU) Prime Minister Jacques-Edouard Alexis presided over the March 6 appointment ceremony. Alexis said he was confident the CEP and the new Director General would "deliver the merchandise" in the holding of Senate elections as soon as possible. The PM emphasized the "harmony" needed between the CEP and the Director General.

¶4. (SBU) CEP President Frantz-Gerard Verret underscored the

current CEP's mandate to organize both the upcoming elections for one-third of the Senate and the indirect elections completing the formation of local and regional government structures. He spotlighted the CEP's need of international help in the "most sensitive areas," while also asking the DG to deliver the CEP from these "shackles." He said the CEP needed foreign and Haitian technical assistance at all levels of the electoral machinery. It also needed a new building, the training of staff, and restructuring of the CEP administration. The CEP wanted the DG to assume financial management of the electoral process, and oversee the compiling of the electoral register, printing national identification cards, and rebuilding the vote tabulation center. The ultimate goal, said Verret, was "institutionalizing" the CEP so that a permanent CEP could be formed.

15. (SBU) Pierre-Louis Opont's short speech stayed true to his self-described reputation as a man of few words. Elections, he sternly intoned, are the "keystone" of a democracy, and Haiti "had no right" to fail. He saw his duty as producing "clear and transparent" elections that would have credibility. He described the DG position as "tightly knit" with the rest of the CEP. The end results should be elections that were "beyond dispute."

Comment

16. (SBU) Opont cultivates an image of no-nonsense, laconic toughness. However, if the champagne toast session in the Director General's office after the ceremony is any indication, he will cultivate a good working relationship

PORT AU PR 00000377 002 OF 002

with the CEP councilors. They toasted, drank, joked, and were photographed by the press as a group. It remains to be seen whether this hope for harmony will translate into effective election management and fruitful cooperation with the international community, given the CEP and DG's electoral inexperience. A Canada-hosted roundtable with the CEP and then DG-Designate Opont March 5 that included donor country representatives and UNDP staff revealed a continuing lack of clarity on the election date. The draft electoral law is still before the parliament. CEP President Verret announced that the Senate and Chamber of Deputies had formed a bi-cameral commission to ease consideration of the bill, but roundtable participants doubted the bill could be passed in less than three to four weeks. If the bill is ready by April and elections announced immediately, the 3-4 months preparation period would not allow Senate elections before July.

SANDERSON